MUSEUM STORIES FOR CHILDREN

Presented by

The James Nelson and Anna Louise Raymond Foundation
for Public School and Children's Lectures

Series XXXI, Number 1
October 1, 1938

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Roosevelt Road and Field Drive
CHICAGO

112267

TAHITI, "THE QUEEN OF THE PACIFIC"

In the middle of the Pacific Ocean, about 1,200 miles south of the Equator, lies the fair island of Tahiti, called by the early explorers "The Queen of the Pacific."

Approaching by boat, one sees towering mountain peaks, shaded from purple to black, thrusting up their heads against the brilliant blue sky, and wearing gauze caps of clouds. Their sides are clothed in dense green forests where coconut and banana trees and all manner of vegetation abound. At their feet white-tipped waves break upon the beaches, grinding the hard coral into soft sand, for the island is fringed with many coral reefs. As one reaches Papeete, the capital of Tahiti, one sees many low houses hiding under coconut trees, and a few fairly modern-looking stores. For Papeete is a modern town in many ways. There are automobiles and electric lights and policemen and a good hotel.

The natives wear plain cotton dresses and suits, the women choosing bright colors, red and purple and bright pink being their favorites. Out in the country where the people are less in contact with civilization they wear the "pareu," a wide piece of cloth which is wound around the waist and which falls a little above the knees, although the women wear theirs somewhat longer. The "pareu" is usually made of red and yellow, or red and white cloth and is very gay and bright. For ornaments all they have to do is to pluck a scarlet hibiscus flower from a tree and put it behind one ear, or weave a wreath of creamy white frangipani blossoms.

They live in a land where Nature provides food and houses and clothing. One old chief, when asked about the early people, said: "Man was created here; this is the garden of Eden." Well, it is, to a certain extent—a beautiful island with a perfect climate (the temperature is never above 90° or below 65° F.), with any kind of fruit or vegetable yours for the picking, with all sorts of fish abounding in the ocean, and brilliant flowers everywhere.

The natives never have to work hard, for their food supply is never-ending. Foreigners say that they are incurably lazy, but who wouldn't be, under such circumstances? They are a happy, healthy, carefree

people. They are hospitable and friendly and love music and dancing. Their only native instruments are a small wooden drum with sharkskins stretched over the ends for drumheads, and a bamboo flute which has a plaintive note. They sit in two long rows facing each other, and sing songs that we might consider monotonous because our ears are trained to different harmonies. They have lovely voices, and they clap time to the songs in perfect rhythm.

Such a varied diet these people have! Coconut trees grow in the back yard, and when it is lunch time a little boy goes skinning up a tree and collects the meal. They drink the fresh coconut milk and eat the fruit of the nut. Then there is the breadfruit which is roasted over the coals or in an open stone oven, and which tastes just like freshly baked bread. The starchy root of the taro plant is ground up and mixed into a pudding called "poi," a staple dish of the Tahitians. The meal is topped off with bananas or mangoes, or any of the other luscious fruits which tempt one from the nearby trees. Meat is not often on the menu, although sometimes a young pig is killed and roasted. But fish are a very important article of diet, as are lobsters and crabs and oysters. The natives go out at night, in their outrigger canoes, with torches. The fish are attracted by the light of the torch and can be easily speared. The nice thing about a Tahitian meal is that there are no dishes to wash. The natives eat with their fingers, using hibiscus leaves as plates, and they just throw the dirty plates away when the meal has been eaten.

The houses in the rural districts are made of upright stakes of bamboo, lashed together in the form of an oval. The hut is thatched with pandanus leaves. There is no furniture at all and the people sit and sleep on woven grass mats on the floor.

In former times the Tahitians had kings and queens and a noble class. The kingship was hereditary, and, instead of a crown, the king wore a girdle of red and yellow 'ura feathers as a symbol of his royalty. When the French conquered the island in 1843, they deposed the reigning queen and set up their own government. Ever since then Tahiti has been a French colony, but, especially in the rural districts, it has retained its charm.

ELIZABETH MCM. HAMBLETON, Guide-lecturer

NOTE: In Halls 25, 28, and 29 plants and trees from Tahiti may be seen, and in Hall 18 corals and fishes are on exhibit.

Save your Museum Stories. You will find them useful for looking up things you may want to know.

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CLIFFORD C. GREGG, Director

MUSEUM STORIES FOR CHILDREN

Field Museum of Natural History

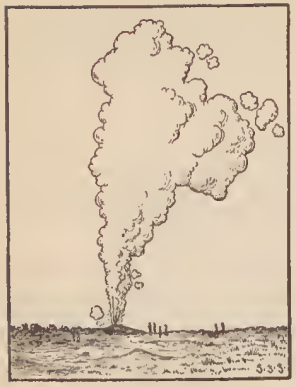
Presented by

The James Nelson and Anna Louise Raymond Foundation for Public School and Children's Lectures

Series XXXI, Number 2
October 8, 1938

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Roosevelt Road and Field Drive
CHICAGO

NATURE'S FOUNTAINS



Geysers are the natural fountains of the world. However, instead of sending up cool, refreshing waters, the geysers spurt forth hot waters, steam and gases. The name geyser comes from the Icelandic word geyser, which means "to gush." The first of these strange phenomena were found in Iceland and then years later several were found in New Zealand and in our own Yellowstone National Park.

As one stands and watches a geyser shoot its water and steam into the air with such bubbling force, one wonders what there is in the earth to cause this action. One thing is certain—the geysers all occur in regions where there were formerly great volcanic disturbances, where lava flowed up from the earth and poured over its surface and finally hardened into the volcanic rocks often seen today. However, it seems that some of this lava under the hard outer surface has never quite cooled; it is still extremely hot.

It is in such places that we find the geysers, but there are two other things necessary. There must be a long, crooked crack which reaches from the surface down to the hot rocks, and there must be plenty of ground water seeping through the rocks and down into the crack.

When all these conditions are right, the ground water seeps down through the rocks and collects in the bottom of the crack. There, in contact with the hot lava and hot rocks, the water is heated. More water continually seeps down from the top until the crack is full and the top water presses down on the bottom water so that it cannot boil and the crooked crack holds the water in. Finally the hottest water at the bottom becomes so hot that it forms steam which pushes a little water out at the top. This lessens the pressure and more steam is immediately formed, which shoves all the water up through the crooked crack and shoots it high into the air. After the water, the steam spurts out with a mighty hiss. It depends upon how large the geyser is as to how much water will be shot out and how long the action will continue.

Usually before the geyser really spurts, it bubbles and gurgles and the water at the top begins to dance and spill over, and then without further warning the waters gush forth with violence.

Some geysers erupt very regularly every few minutes, hours, days or months while others are most erratic in their behavior. Some geysers play for only a few minutes while others play for hours before all the water and steam have escaped. "Old Faithful" is one of the best known geysers and is so called because of its faithful eruption every sixty to ninety minutes. This geyser plays for about five minutes and shoots from 100 to 175 feet in height. Other geysers have greater play but are not so regular. The Giant Geyser shoots from 200 to 250 feet for about an hour but this is most irregular. Some geysers have ceased shooting altogether and are now only hot springs. A geyser can be forced into action by dumping a great amount of soap into the opening. This causes the waters to foam and bubble, which releases the pressure and the steam and water shoot up.

After the eruption the water falls down again on the rocks and trickles back into the ground and some of it finds its way into the same crack from which it came. There, close to the hot rocks, it is heated again and eventually there is another eruption. As the waters fall back to the ground they are beginning to cool and evaporate, leaving some of the minerals, chiefly silica, deposited around the mouth of the geyser. Algae help in this too because these tiny plants living in the hot waters are able to take the silica from the water. The plants become covered with the silica until they look like strange frosted flowers. They usually stick to the edge of the pool of water and many of them accumulate there. All of this adds to the building up of cones, mounds and terraces around the geysers. The material thus formed is called geyserite. It often has the form of an opal, but is pale gray in color and does not have the sparkle nor the beauty of the precious opal.

A few geysers have slowed down their action and have become hot springs; there are close to 3,000 hot springs in Yellowstone National Park. The waters in these springs are hot and sometimes steaming and bubbling, but they do not shoot like fountains. The hot spring waters are usually beautifully colored by the tiny algae living within and like the geyser waters they build up beautiful terraces and strange formations from the minerals in solution. Should the springs become dry, the algae die and the terraces lose their brilliant colors.

MIRIAM WOOD, Guide-lecturer

NOTE: You may see a sample of geyserite in Hall 34, Case 6.

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CLIFFORD C. GREGG, Director

MUSEUM STORIES FOR CHILDREN

Presented by

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for Public School and Children's Lectures

Natural History

Series XXXI, Number 3
October 15, 1938

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Roosevelt Road and Field Drive
CHICAGO

THE WREN FAMILY

Noisy! Excitable! Fussy! Pugnacious! Such words are commonly used in describing the tiny birds that dart in and out of the various kinds of wren houses swung from trees, trellises and other supports in our yards. They do indeed belong to Jenny Wren and the members of her immediate household, but not to some of her first cousins. She raises her family as close to the homes of people as she can get, while some members of the wren family search for the silent places, and mouse-like slip from view when man approaches.

Wrens are closely related to the mocking-birds and thrashers, and are found in greatest numbers in the western hemisphere. There seems to be no kind of area which does not have some kind of wren. Swamp lands, volcanic rocks, cactus growths, hills and high mountains —each has its special kind of wren.

The build of body, tail and wings varies greatly among the different kinds. Some have short tails and rounded wings and are surely stay-at-homes. Some have powerful wings and tails and can rise to great altitudes and cross mountains. The Peruvian House Wren crosses the Andes at the height of 13,000 feet. Some have almost no tails at all, like the exquisite little brown wrens of the Himalaya Mountains.

The colors and markings also differ. We are all familiar with the quiet, soft, grayish-brown of our House Wrens; both father and mother are dressed alike. How strange must seem the Bogota Wrens with their pure white shirt-fronts and the "Happy Wrens" of southwest Mexico. The latter are bubbling bits of song with the entire under parts a pale cinnamon in color except for white chins and black and white striped collars. Some wrens have bright colors on their shoulders and many have heavy bars of black and white on the wings, backs and tails. A few even have white tips to the side tail feathers.

There are about 165 known species of wrens. Of this number fifteen kinds are found in Europe and other eastern lands, while most of the remainder live in the tropics of our own part of the world. North America also is rich in kinds and Illinois especially so.

Most common and best known are the Eastern and Western House Wrens, which Darius Green called "World-wise Busybodies." With

shining eyes and tail erect they scold us one minute and give us a rippling song the next. All day long they are busy searching for the injurious insects upon which they feed, so the more wrens in the neighborhood the more vegetables in the gardens. House Wrens are not at all particular about their nests. If no man-made house is handy an old tin cup on the porch rafter will do, or perhaps a cow's skull hung on a post. One pair squeezed through a narrow crack in a wooden mailbox nailed to a post. At one end they heaped sticks as a barricade against the daily deposit of mail. Another pair built a nest in one leg of a pair of overalls hung on a porch. The important thing seems to be close to people.

Southern Illinois has the Bewick's or Long-tailed House Wren, which prefers barns and smaller buildings near them. One pair built a bulky nest of sticks, straws, coarse feathers and chips fastened together with spider webs in a piece of stove pipe in the garret of a smoke house. The Bewick's song is loud and ringing like a meadowlark's, or soft and chant-like, and is usually given as the bird perches upon a fence or roof, head thrown back, long tail hanging down. While hunting for insects in stumps or brush piles it twitches its white-edged tail sideways.

The large Carolina or Mocking Wren builds in post holes and tree cavities. It is one of the most valuable of Illinois birds as it wages constant warfare on chinch bugs, scaly insects, weevils and caterpillars. Its song is loud and clear and its whistle is much like that of our state bird, the cardinal. Some say it says: "Tea-kettle; tea-kettle; tea-kettle."

In the marsh areas are found the Long-billed and Short-billed Marsh Wrens, the latter almost as small as a hummingbird and with eggs just as delicate. These wrens build marvelous dome-shaped nests with entrances at the sides. Sometimes, they will build several, but will line only one. No one knows why they have the extra nests.

The most exquisite wren is the Winter Wren of the woods. Very tiny, it moves from place to place in short, sudden hops, bending downward with tail erect. Like a mouse it runs in and out of hollow logs. The song rivals that of any other bird of its size. Once you have heard the full, rich, musical melody, you will want to hear it again.

MARGARET M. CORNELL, Guide-lecturer

NOTE: In Hall 21 may be seen many of the wrens of the United States.

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CLIFFORD C. GREGG, Director

MUSEUM STORIES FOR CHILDREN

Presented by

The James Nelson and Anna Louise Raymond Foundation
for Public School and Children's Lectures

Field [illegible]
Natural History

Series XXXI, Number 4
October 22, 1938

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Roosevelt Road and Field Drive
CHICAGO

A STORK FAMILY

The stork is one of the best known of Old World birds, whether it lives in Morocco, Holland or Poland. It is protected wherever it makes its home and becomes practically a member of the farmer's family just as a dog or cat. So songs, pictures and stories about storks are favorites with us all.

There was a time, before men built houses, when storks nested in large trees and on ledges of rock. Now they generally build their nests on housetops in cities or villages. The farmers often put a wagon wheel out to serve as a platform on which the storks can build their nests, because people think storks bring good luck to the homes on which they build.

The nests are made of branches and twigs and are neatly lined with grass or straw. In a new nest the sides are not very high, but the storks come back every year and add to these nests. Sometimes they are built up three or four feet high and the farmer must take away part of the nest so that the weight of it does not crush his roof.

Young storks never stand up on their long, slim legs until they are almost ready to fly. They sit all day on their heels, often with their toes up in the air. This seems to be a rather uncomfortable position because they have to balance themselves on two points and a gust of wind topples them over.

Storks, like all birds, are early risers, and even though the sun is just coming up, the mother bird has already been out and caught a frog for breakfast. Usually the mother and father birds partly swallow the food to carry it back to the young. When they alight on the nest they begin to regurgitate or cast the food out of their craws or crops where it has been stored. The long spear-like bills are shaken to and fro and the food scattered over the nest. The young storks scramble for it like young chickens after corn. Foods such as frogs, mice, or snakes are always carried back to the nest in the bills of the parent birds.

Later in the morning, the parents go foraging again and may be seen any time of day stalking slowly along over fields and pastures. Their plumage of pure white and deep black and their bright red bills

and legs are especially beautiful when seen against the fresh green grass of a luxuriant meadow. By the time the old birds return to the nest the young are hungry again and are wildly happy at the promise of another breakfast. They show their excitement by rapidly "clappering" their bills. Storks do not have voices and the only way they can make a noise is to snap their bills together and express themselves by a series of telegraphic clicks.

Young birds develop their wing powers by practicing little short flights across the nest. After each trip they seem to be greatly excited over their success. By the end of August they can fly as well as their parents. At this time they all gather into large groups and start their long migration to Africa. They fly very high and very fast; in olden days it was believed they flew to the moon. They do not fly in any definite formation as do the geese but are constantly changing position and leader. Some storks go as far as the Cape of Good Hope and spend the winter moving about following swarms of grasshoppers.

When the storks return north in the spring, the first to reach the villages take the best nests. After deciding what needs to be done, the old storks begin at once to repair and add to the already huge nest. Many storks steal sticks from the crow and magpie nests. The nest is often protected with briars on the outside because smaller birds, such as sparrows, sometimes build their nests in the foundation of the stork's nest. The sparrows come up while the old birds are away and steal the food left there for the young storks.

The eggs are white and about the size of a goose egg. While they are hatching the parents take turns sitting upon them. The young are clothed with fluffy down, and even while very young develop feathers like those of the parents, except that they are cleaner. Old storks are nearly always dirty from wading about in muddy marshes. There they are often seen standing motionless upon one leg. One may stand this way for hours, bill laid upon breast, until finally with a sudden, swift movement a frog is caught, which is carried off to help feed the always hungry young ones on the nest.

LOREN P. WOODS, Guide-lecturer

NOTE: A stork family from Poland may be seen at the extreme western end of Hall 20.

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CLIFFORD C. GREGG, Director

MUSEUM STORIES FOR CHILDREN

Field Museum of Natural History

Presented by

The James Nelson and Anna Louise Raymond Foundation
for Public School and Children's Lectures

Series XXXI, Number 5
October 29, 1938

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Roosevelt Road and Field Drive
CHICAGO

THE MOSSES

The plant children of Nature are of many kinds. Some are mighty forest trees with flowers as brilliant in color as the birds and moths that flash through their branches; some are equipped with hard spiny coats for life on deserts; others are simply built little plants, all soft and tiny, which live in the water and in damp places. Among the latter are the Mosses—plants that have had a most important part in making the earth on which we live so beautiful.

They do not have thick coats made up of many layers of cells as do the higher plants, so can drink in water through their skins when water is plentiful. When the air is dry, the simple leaves are shriveled or folded and held against the stems. In this state they may be preserved for years. On being placed in water they again absorb all they can hold and take their original shapes. Salt water is not friendly to mosses, so none are found in the seas. The so-called "Irish Moss" gathered from the oceans for food is really an alga, a plant even more simple than moss in build. It should be called "Irish Seaweed," for it really is a seaweed.

Mosses grow on very high mountains, on bare rocks and ledges and on wind-blown plateaus. When you hike out into the country you find them along the roadsides, on fallen logs and stumps. Perhaps, you rest your head against a soft, green mat on the damp side of a forest giant. The mat is of moss. The farmer often refers to mosses as "pests" when a patch takes possession of an old worn-out field and drives out the few blades of grass remaining. He likes them still less when they get a start on the old shingles of a roof and change its color to a soft gray-green. The older the wood, the more quickly the moss spreads, for there it finds the necessary food and moisture.

If a tiny moss plant is separated from its neighbors and looked at under a magnifying glass, it will be found to consist of three main parts. At the bottom are little rootlets known to the scientists as "rhizoids." As mosses are very low in the plant family, they do not have real roots. Above the threadlike rhizoids extends the stem with its leaves. Sometimes, the stem carries a round or pointed capsule at its tip; sometimes, the capsule grows from the side of the stem or

nestles among the leaves. The capsules are the most important parts of the plants for they contain the bits of parent plant known as "spores." It is from these powdery, seedlike spores that new plants grow when the wind blows them into the right growing positions. In the case of mosses that grow in dry places where the rainy season is too short for the parent plants to produce spores and ripen them for distribution, the parent plants dry up, break into pieces and sail with the wind. Should they land where food and moisture are plentiful new plants start from the pieces.

There is one kind of moss you can see and study carefully because it is found in open places as well as in parks and forest preserves. It is called "Hairy Cap Moss." It is large compared to many other kinds and shows plainly the capsule and its stem. The two are shaped much like a Turkish pipe. If you find the capsule when the light, brown hairy veil is still over the case, you will know why it is called "Hairy Cap." When the veil drops the case looks as if it wore a dunce cap. In the capsule are many, many, green, dustlike spores which will go sailing when they are ripe and the lid opens.

The most valuable of mosses is the Sphagnum or Peat Moss which grows in ponds, bogs, streams and rivulets of cool regions. It is large, soft and much-branched, with leaves sharp-pointed or spoon-shaped for holding great quantities of water. It may be pale or bright green, bluish or whitish or even pink. Sphagnums grow from the tips of the stems and the dead part drops down into the water. In time this forms masses known as "peat," the most valuable fuel of northern lands. In our own Chicago area, some of the richest farm lands are drained peat bogs which the farmer calls "muck." Frequently, sphagnum grows over the tops of ponds only and forms treacherous quaking covers. Many an animal and man has fallen through and lost his life in the cold, acid waters beneath. Often such quaking bogs provide homes for the weird pitcher plant, the delicate orchids and even cranberries. The most important uses of sphagnum are for fuel, surgical dressings, for stuffings for mattresses, pillows and walls and as packing for nursery shippings.

Thus do the mosses play their part in the life of today.

MARGARET M. CORNELL, Guide-lecturer

NOTE: Different kinds of mosses may be seen in Hall 29 and in some of the habitat cases.

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CLIFFORD C. GREGG, Director

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Field Museum of Natural History

Series XXXI, Number 6
November 5, 1938

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Roosevelt Road and Field Drive
CHICAGO

SHEEP PAST AND PRESENT

Sheep were among the very first of wild animals to be domesticated by man. But no one knows whether it was a wild ancestor from Asia or one from Europe that was first tamed. Today there lives in Asia Minor a wild sheep known as the Urial thought to be the ancestor of most of the modern breeds of domesticated sheep. However, the islands off the north coast of Scotland such as the Faroes, the Isle of Man, the Shetlands and Iceland, have sheep more like the Mouflon, an antelope-like sheep found only on the islands of Corsica and Sardinia.

The use of sheep can be traced as far back as the Swiss Lake Dwellers, and from some of the ancient monuments of Egypt showing the god Amon, we know that the Egyptians of that date had so much respect for their sheep that the head of the god was represented as a sheep's head. Pictures of that time show the Egyptian sheep to have been long-legged and long-haired. Many of them were mummified.

Sheep in a pasture make a charming picture as they look at one with head held high. Like cattle they gather their food rapidly and then take their time chewing the cud. But they differ from cattle in being incapable of taking care of themselves in times of excitement or trouble. Unless they have a herder, or a dog or goat leader, they are apt to become panicky or stampede.

All wild sheep have short tails and hairy coats. In tropical lands most of the domesticated sheep still wear the hairy coat, while in our own and in colder lands, the sheep have wool coats for greater warmth. Except in the case of the Merino sheep, the wool fleece is renewed each year. Man cuts the wool just before hot weather comes on and it is made into threads and yarns which are woven into cloth or knit into sweaters and socks to keep us warm.

In many parts of the world sheep are the most important animals. The nomadic peoples who wander from place to place often depend upon them for their entire supply of clothing, food and tallow. They use the milk as we do cows' milk. Some of you may have eaten Roquefort cheese which is made in France from sheep's milk. It is considered one of the finest cheeses known. From very early days, sheep have

been used as burden animals, and are still used by some peoples. They often are turned onto newly sown fields to tread the seed into the ground, and in Tibet, one frequently passes sheep on the mountain trails with heavy loads of salt tied over their backs. They are tame, patient sheep and with a good leader will travel twelve miles a day with ease.

By careful handling of different types of sheep man has been able to develop sheep to supply every kind of need. Some are so heavily coated with fleece that they move with difficulty; some have been able to develop great curved horns suggesting the magnificent ones of the wild Marco Polo Sheep of Asia; others have developed the strangest of tails and huge drooping ears.

Fat-tailed sheep were raised by the ancient nomadic Hebrews of Palestine and are still highly prized by all the peoples of Europe, Asia and Africa who do not use pigs. Such sheep have immense tails often weighing one-fourth of the entire weight of the animal itself. The tails are bare on the undersides except for the tips. The fat is used as grease for lamps and in cooking. In Arabia, it is fried in thin slices and considered a great delicacy. The Persian fat-tailed lambs provide the fine, tightly-curled expensive fur known as Persian Lamb.

The Mingrelians of Asiatic Russia since early times have raised the long-tailed sheep known as Colchins. These sheep have beautiful, fine, curly wool and were introduced into Europe by the Greeks. It was to secure the wool of Colchins that Jason and his men sailed in the ship Argo in quest of the Golden Fleece.

People traveling in Mongolia, China and many other lands are always interested in the sheep they see, especially if the sheep have no tails at all or only a stub. These are strange looking sheep and are called the "fat-rumped." They are raised chiefly for the masses of fat on the rumps. A year-old lamb of this kind of sheep is the standard of money in Central Asia.

Sheep may be stupid; they may be forever bleating, but they fill a place in the lives of people that could not be taken by any other animal.

MARGARET M. CORNELL, Guide-lecturer

NOTE: In Hall 13 may be seen a magnificent Thian Shan Sheep, a Mouflon, a Dall's Sheep from Alaska and a Canada Bighorn; Hall 17 has a habitat case of Marco Polo Sheep, and Hall 16 a case of Stone's Mountain Sheep.

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MUSEUM STORIES FOR CHILDREN

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FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Roosevelt Road and Field Drive
CHICAGO

AMERICAN MARSUPIALS

The Virginia Opossum and its relatives, the Texas Opossum and the Florida Opossum, are the only North American representatives of the marsupials or pouch-bearing mammals. They are a strange remnant of a group left over from bygone ages when the marsupials were plentiful over the earth. Their general appearance is like that of a rat, but their long, scaly, hairless tails are prehensile, their noses longer and their ears bare.

The opossum family is a large one, many members being found from eastern North America south through Central and South America. Their nearest relatives are the Dasyurids of Australia, called opossums by the people there although they are not true opossums.

The Virginia and common Mexican Opossums are the best known of the group. They are nearly the size of a cat, with gray, woolly fur. They are at home either on the ground or in the trees. Their hind feet bear grasping toes and their long, snaky tails can be looped around small limbs so they can climb very well indeed. Climbing is very necessary since this is a good method of escape from their many meat-eating enemies. Their favorite food is persimmons, for which they must often climb, but they also eat a variety of foods including acorns, berries, and roots. Often they do a little damage by taking birds' eggs or killing chickens, but their value as fur bearers more than offsets this.

Opossums have a great many interesting habits. Their days are spent sleeping in hollow logs and trees and their hunting is done at night. They do not hibernate all winter as do the wood-chucks. Theirs is a sleep of happy convenience. If the weather is bad they stay snugly in bed rather than go out hunting.

But too often during their nightly rambles they hear the baying of the hounds and find themselves captured by dogs or men. When cornered by such an enemy they appear to faint or die from fright. From this we get the expression "playing 'possum." However, they recover from their lifeless state rapidly enough and are ready to take advantage of any opening for escape.

The young are born in the spring and are about half an inch long. They make their own way to the pouch or pocket, which is found on

the under side of the mother's body, like that of a kangaroo. Often the young ones climb out to have a look at the world and often they steal a ride on their good-natured mother's back, their chins hooked over her backbone and their little hairless toes firmly gripping her wavy gray fur. There are usually five to thirteen young born at a time. Since opossums can adapt themselves to changing conditions, they are not facing extinction as are their relatives in Australia.

Besides the well known Virginia Opossum, there are various other species which inhabit other parts of the Americas, especially the tropical parts. One of these is the Murine or Mouse Opossum from Central America. They are smaller than the Virginia Opossum, being truly of mouse size. They are soft-furred, yellow or brownish in color, with long, naked, prehensile tails, large eyes, and broad hands and feet. The young opossums are not carried in a fur-lined pouch but cling to the fur of the mother. The members of this group live entirely on insects and fruits, their favorite fruit being bananas.

The Mexican Woolly Opossum is well adapted for climbing by the structure of its feet and tail. The fur is thick, soft and woolly and of a dull yellowish or grayish color. The face is pale gray except for a dark brown streak down the forehead. There is no abdominal pouch in this group either and the young are carried on the mother's back.

The Quica Opossums from South America are shorter haired than the Woolly or Common Opossums and spend more time on the ground than in the trees. They are dark grayish in color. Their favorite foods are ground-nesting birds and crabs which they find along the banks of streams. These opossums do have a pouch for carrying the young.

"Yapocks" or Water Opossums of South America also have pouches but differ from other opossums in having the hind toes webbed.

Except for the Virginia Opossum very little is known of the habits of this large and interesting group of mammals. Most of them live in lowland tropical jungles or in dense forests near the bottoms of mountains and such places are hard to explore. Then, too, all the opossums are active only at night.

LOREN P. WOODS, Guide-lecturer

NOTE: Marsupials may be seen in Hall 15, in the case where the kangaroos are shown.

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CLIFFORD C. GREGG, Director

MUSEUM STORIES FOR CHILDREN

Field Museum of Natural History

Presented by

The James Nelson and Anna Louise Raymond Foundation
for Public School and Children's Lectures

Series XXXI, Number 8
November 19, 1938

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Roosevelt Road and Field Drive
CHICAGO

On Hallowe'en people dress up in masks of devils and witches and rush around town knocking over ashcans and ringing doorbells. They feel that just because they wear masks no one can recognize or punish them. At masquerades or carnivals, like the Mardi Gras at New Orleans, many people wear masks and feel free to do what they want, for this same reason. It is so much easier to act like a devil or a witch if one knows that a disguise makes him look like one. Then too, it is fun to mystify people, for anyone who is confronted by a masked figure will be terrified, or very curious, or highly amused, depending on the disguise and the circumstances. If one met a person in a ghost costume at a masquerade it would be very amusing, but if one met him at night in a graveyard it wouldn't be so funny.

Just as we dress up in mother's and father's clothes and pretend we are grownups, so primitive people dress up to look like their heroes or gods. They firmly believe that by wearing a certain mask they really become the person or god that the mask represents. In New Guinea certain tribes fashion tall masks out of feathers. At a special time of year, with a fanfare of shell trumpets, and wearing their headdresses, they dance into the village where a singing and dancing throng greets them. This symbolizes the annual visit of the gods, who are entertained and well fed, whereupon they depart and the village settles down for another year, knowing that the gods are pleased.

The Pueblo Indians of New Mexico and Arizona consider their masks sacred because the spirit of a god is supposed to dwell in each one. They pray to them and perform colorful ceremonies in which dancers, wearing the masks, which they call "katcinas," portray the gods.

The Iroquois Indians, who live in the eastern United States, believe in a group of wicked deities who have no bodies, called the "Flying Heads," who fly around causing all manner of diseases and ailments. A secret society, called the "False Faces" because of their hideous carved wooden masks with crooked grins and popping eyes and lumpy noses, performs ceremonies in order to drive away the "Flying Heads" and with them the diseases.

Other people use masks as part of their costumes in festivals or plays. Each mask represents some hero or god, and the stories that are acted out deal, for the most part, with the deeds of these glorious ones, how the brave prince rescues the beautiful princess from the wicked dragon, and so forth.

The beautifully carved masks of the Negroes of Africa are portraits of important ancestors or heroes. For instance there was Fopo, who was a fierce warrior. Fopo used to go to the market place and mix up all the food that was laid out for sale, just for the fun of it. Nowadays, when the story of this hero is acted out, someone wearing Fopo's mask rushes around the market mixing up all the food in the baskets.

Where once upon a time shadow figures were used in Java, masked actors now act out the ancient Buddhist legends. There is a religious feeling about the performance, and offerings are made to the gods before and after the play. In China the plays often deal with the terrible punishments that sinners on this earth will receive when they go to Purgatory. The actors, portraying the gods of the underworld, wear very beautiful costumes and their masks would scare the devil himself. Clowns in funny masks add humor to the plays.

The Nō drama of Japan is a very formal type of performance, with every action done in the same way it has been done for hundreds of years. There is no scenery, and the audience has to imagine that the hero is galloping through the mountains on his white steed, or that the princess is sitting in her garden watching the goldfish. The masks too have never been changed through the ages, and they are about the most perfect which have been made anywhere. They are made of wood coated with plaster, and are lacquered or gilded.

Nowadays face-paint is used in the theaters in most of these countries, and the masks are kept as family heirlooms or are put into museums. Here in Field Museum you will see masks from all over the world, for almost every people has used them for some purpose, whether to worship their gods, to cure their ailments, or to scare naughty children so that they will behave.

ELIZABETH MCM. HAMBLETON, Guide-lecturer

NOTE: Masks may be seen in Halls 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 32, A, D, E, G, J, L.

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CLIFFORD C. GREGG, Director

MUSEUM STORIES FOR CHILDREN

Field Museum of Natural History

Presented by

The James Nelson and Anna Louise Raymond Foundation
for Public School and Children's Lectures

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FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Roosevelt Road and Field Drive
CHICAGO

STRANGE TOYS

Toys have delighted boys and girls in all lands since very early times. What strange magic is there in a brightly colored rattle that it makes a baby stop crying? Why does a little girl cuddle her doll, or a Mexican Indian boy carve the head of a bull from a piece of wood and then dash around it as if he were a proud bull fighter and this wooden head a live bull?

Perhaps it is because all children like to make believe or imitate, and in so doing they can pretend to do only those things with which they are familiar. They imitate the actions they admire most in their parents and other people, or incidents from stories they hear. It is natural then that the toys children make and play with are often very much like the people themselves and their ways of living. Because boys and girls of one country are not always familiar with the life of other people they think other toys are strange. However, it is only because each group of boys and girls is accustomed to his own toys.

Among primitive people especially, the toys are often miniature models of the objects used daily by the older people. From the Philippine Islands comes a boy's toy, a small wooden carabao with its yoke for pulling carts and sleds (Hall H, Case 37). The Philippine boy had probably watched his father working with a carabao and so he too wanted to do the same with a toy carabao.

In the same way a small Mexican girl has a toy metate and mano, or grinding stones. Instead of grinding up real corn for tortillas as her mother does, the girl puts mud into her metate and grinds it with the mano and makes mud tortillas.

Some kinds of toys are found in almost all countries. Balls have amused people, both young and old, for many years. Pictures from Egyptian tombs show that the early Nile peoples played ball. When the Spaniards came to Mexico in 1521 they were much intrigued by, and a little bit afraid of the balls with which the Mexicans were playing. As the balls were bounced the Spaniards thought they were possessed with spirits. They did not know that the balls were made of rubber. The North American Indians made many kinds of balls. One was

made of wood with a hole in one side of it; this ball was thrown into the air and was supposed to be caught on the end of a stick. If the ball missed the stick, usually the player was smacked soundly on the hand by the hard wooden ball. Today there are all kinds of balls made of different materials—whatever the people possess. The Eskimos often make balls of pieces of animal skins carefully and beautifully sewed together and filled with moss or sand (Hall 10, Case 43). Balls from New Guinea are made of banana leaves (Hall A, Case 21). A ball from the Malay Peninsula looks like a mere framework. It is made of rattan and is a complete football. The Malay boys kick this ball and the point of the game is never to let the ball touch the ground (Hall G, Case 19).

Dolls too are found in all countries. Indian girls have dolls which are miniatures of themselves. Even the dolls' cradles, clothing and tipis are models of those used by the Indians (Hall 5, Case 26). And so it is in each country—the dolls resemble the people and their ways.

Kites are of all kinds, beautiful and fantastic. Many people have heard of and possibly seen the magnificent kites made for the boys of China and Malaysia. Their kites are made to resemble birds, butterflies, animals, fishes and spirits. Each kite is made of a light framework of wood and covered with thin paper or silk. Some kites have wonderful ornaments dangling in long strings; these look especially beautiful as the kites soar in the air (Hall G, Case 19).

Many children of different lands have toy animals and birds. They are carved in wood, modeled in clay, woven of fibers, or made from shells. From Madagascar came two fat little pigs made from blackened gourds, their quizzical faces etched in lime (Hall E, Case 27).

Two of the most unusual toys in Field Museum came from the Maidu Indians of California and the Admiralty Islands. The little Maidu Indian boy or girl fastened two pine cones on a stick, one on either end; then the child balanced this toy on his foot and kicked it as far as he could kick it (Hall 6, Case 26). The Admiralty Island boy made himself a bow and along the string he fastened several little wooden fishes; as he lifted the bow, the fishes flopped down the string to the bottom of the bow.

MIRIAM WOOD, Guide-lecturer

NOTE: Other toys may be found among the exhibits in Halls 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, A, D, E, F, G, and H.

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